

## **URBAN REGENERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN COASTAL CITIES**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development (MCSD) has adopted in 2001 a series of recommendations aimed at introducing sustainable urban management in the Mediterranean Region. A number of recommendations pointed to the need for urban regeneration, a fairly new (compared to experiences in the Northern Europe) urban concept in this region. Priority Actions Program Regional Activity Center (PAP/RAC) and the Blue Plan Regional Activity Center (BP/RAC) of the UNEP/MAP were entrusted to implement the recommendations, and to carry out the project on analyzing the "state-of-the-art" of urban regeneration in the Mediterranean. The European Commission financially supported the project. Major findings of the project will be presented as well as an outline of the regional guidelines on urban regeneration.

### **THE URBAN DEGRADATION**

Urban areas are complex and dynamic systems. They reflect the many processes that drive physical, social, environmental and economic transition and they themselves are prime generators of many such changes. In numerous Mediterranean cities, over the past two decades, the dense urban tissue has been exposed to transformations, which have sometimes been substantial. The phenomenon of abandoned land refers to a great variety of situations, depending on the size, on the more or less strategic location of lands, on the nature of the disappeared activity, as well as on the urban dynamics able to absorb them. Several typical situations that exist in the Mediterranean (primarily South European) countries could be described as follows:

- After the mines have been abandoned, which deeply affected former industrial areas, we are facing the phenomenon of abandoned industrial zones as a consequence of new world dynamics. In France, in 1986, DATAR /French state urban planning agency) estimated that there were some 15-20,000 ha (37.5-50 thousand acres) of abandoned industrial areas in the overall national territory. In 1996, the total surface of abandoned land in Italy was estimated at some 20,000 ha. Those abandoned industrial zones have different forms: simple constructions inserted into the urban tissue, large equipment, large industrial complexes such as steel factories in Genoa (200 ha) and Naples (370 ha), or shipyards in La Ciotat (40 ha), la Seyne-sur-Mer (34 ha) and Bilbao (30 ha).
- A number of towns situated on seashores and river banks have been confronted with the creation of abandoned harbour lands, as a consequence of the evolution of maritime transports and the modernisation of harbours. In the Mediterranean context, this refers mostly to the spaces where, until the implementation of large projects of town and harbour transformation, some activities had been maintained despite their inadequacy or degradation.

- Simultaneously, the abandoned railways have multiplied, a phenomenon that can be connected to the abandoned industrial zones or declining harbour zones (railway station of La Joliette in Marseilles).
- Finally, there are abandoned military zones: in France, for instance, the heritage declared useless by the army covers a surface of 7,000 ha, including some barracks and hospitals implanted in the town core.

#### URBAN REGENERATION DEFINED

By the end of the 1980s, a large number of European cities started the formulation of policies of "regenerating" or "re-conquering the urban abandoned land", in order to reconsolidate their economic and social bases, supported by large urban and architectural projects. The South European and, very often the Mediterranean ones, are taking the leading role, underlying the attributes of their new urban, indeed metropolitan conditions. Barcelona, Genoa and Seville undertook urban regeneration in 1992, on the occasion of major international events. A few years later, Bilbao, Marseilles, Naples and Lisbon also started a deep transformation of abandoned or strongly degraded sites. Reconversion operations are in course in Athens, Alicante, Koper, and Thessalonica, and are envisaged in Algiers, Alexandria, Aleppo, Tunis, Tangiers, and Split.

Urban regeneration is a comprehensive and integrated vision and action, which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental conditions of an area that, has been subject to change. Urban regeneration goes beyond urban renewal, which is, essentially, a process dealing with the physical change only. Urban regeneration implies that any approach to tackle the problems encountered in cities should be constructed with a longer-term, more strategic purpose in mind. The strategic view is necessary, and even crucial if we want to realise the objectives of social and environmental change, which are long-term in nature.

#### GUIDELINES: HOW TO START THE URBAN REGENERATION PROCESS

The primary aim of urban regeneration is to address the complex dynamics of modern urban areas and their problems by revitalizing their economic, social, environmental and cultural functions. The particular complexity of urban problems in each city drives to a large extent the need for urban regeneration, its focus and scale:

- The need prescribes the goals and objectives, that is, the desirable ends towards which an urban regeneration process is to lead.
- The focus provides structure (and priorities) to the various multiple-dimension actions in the form of key interventions/projects.
- The scale refers to the spatial and financial extent of the intervention.

The particularities of each case drive the initiation of the process in the sense that starting the process can be generated under various stimuli: economic, social, environmental or institutional.

- Economic stimuli can be positive or negative, in a sense of opportunities or threats like a drive to capture new dynamic sectors (i.e. R+D, ICT, tourism, etc.) and

markets (trade flows) or dampen the effect of declining sectors (i.e. shipbuilding and heavy industries, etc.) or shrinking markets.

- Social stimuli can be also positive or negative in the sense of providing for changing needs and lifestyles (i.e. cultural events, etc.) or facing social problems (i.e. poverty areas, natural disaster areas, ghetto districts, etc.).
- Environmental causes might also provide an impetus to urban regeneration, mostly on the negative side, in the sense of addressing to the problems of urban districts with acute environmental degradation or environmental risks, etc.
- Institutional/political causes can be at the basis of launching a process of urban regeneration in the sense that new opportunities can be captured or new threats can be the challenges as for example when broader geopolitical changes (like the EU or the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, etc.) or a new legal regime (i.e. a new planning instrument) or a special event (i.e. world expo, Olympic games, etc.) or a new leadership (i.e. change in Mayor or Government) can offer new economic, social and cultural opportunities for change.

Often it is a combination of factors, which stimulates municipal authorities to take up the opportunity for urban regeneration. Furthermore, an urban regeneration process can start in a planned manner, that is under conditions of anticipating changes and acting early (planning context) or as a response to an anticipated event (like in the case of the Olympic Games) or the creation of new major infrastructure or center of activity (new airport or port or a university or a business complex) or in political visioning or even a response to a natural (or other) disaster, etc. Regardless of the stimulus for starting the process there have to be some key elements present to trigger the process, that is, a combination of factors which will eventually create favorable conditions for translating intentions into an operational –and eventually successful–program of intervention.

Among these factors, the most important are:

- *A long-term perspective.* There is no question that urban change takes a long time and in that sense a strategic view is important to guide the urban regeneration process. This would provide assistance in maintaining the interest and commitment of the key actors towards a common cause.
- *Political will and commitment.* It is evident that political support is necessary to muster the key actors and the community towards a complex intervention such as urban regeneration. Any long-term intervention is bound to meet with economic/financial, political or other kinds of fluctuations due to changes in the external or internal policy context. In this respect societal commitment is important to keep up the process.
- *Multi-actor/stakeholder participation.* The scale and complexity of urban regeneration often exceeds the capacities of local, regional or national authorities to generate change, although in some occasions this cannot be excluded as an option. In most cases mobilizing a multiplicity of actors is important. It is evident that each actor is expected to pursue a limited number of actions, suitable to its role and capacity, but within a broad common framework.

- *Organizational framework.* This is an important element in structuring participation and can be conceived in terms of rules and procedures regarding decisions and priority setting.
- *Institutional/legal framework.* This requires the existence of an enabling framework to proceed with the intervention and is often the most difficult factor as the rule is that there is a multiplicity of fragmented and overlapping responsibilities, which hinder large-scale complex interventions.
- *Financing.* An obvious necessity given the scale and complexity of intervention. It is often the single factor, which is responsible for stalling such complex interventions.
- *Maintaining the Process.* This is a central element in urban regeneration since it provides the basic axis for an urban regeneration activity. In this sense it provides a structuring axis for all the above factors. Key element in maintaining the process is a system of monitoring and evaluation.

## MAJOR STEPS OF THE PROCESS

In the ***Reconnaissance*** stage, a number of problems could be uncovered, which could, then, trigger an interest to the need for urban regeneration:

- **Economic:** limited private investments, unemployment, declining urban economies, economic mono – culture, declining entrepreneurship, etc.
- **Social:** declining and aging population, poverty, deteriorating services and infrastructure, etc.
- **Spatial:** pockets of deprivation, high-density residential areas, illegal residential development, etc.
- **Environmental:** loss of open spaces, air pollution, increased noise levels, degradation of urban landscape, destruction of cultural sites and monuments, etc.
- **Institutional:** complex and outdated urban management framework, poor implementation, overlapping responsibilities

In the ***Trends Exploration*** the following is being done: exploration of the broader economic and social development issues; anticipated development of the city in terms of the existing policies and planned projects/programs foreseen; and opportunities for action identified. In the third stage, the ***Goals and Objectives*** are identified. They might include goals such as: rehabilitation of complex urban structures; improvement of the environment as well as the quality of life of city dwellers; preservation of the valuable and unique fabric of selected areas; reversal of the deterioration of specific urban zones; and restructuring of economic activities located in the urban fabric. Objectives could include: restoration of buildings; rehabilitation of private residences and upgrading of infrastructure; identification, analysis and definition of business needs for selected areas (urban core, city outskirts, etc.); development of new business and professional opportunities; introduction of indirect measures (infrastructure) and direct tools to encourage economic growth; capacity building for institutions and agencies responsible for urban management and physical planning; etc.

In the ***Strategy Developing*** stage, the goals and objectives are accompanied by a description of the basic characteristics of the intervention. Such characteristics refer to the

key planning interventions, the financial scheme and organizational structures. These are the outcome of translating the goals and objectives into a strategy, meaning a coherent and coordinated system of actions in spatial and temporal sequences, organized to achieve the desired ends (goals and objectives). This part requires the assignment of the task to a key agency or special organization with a strong technical capacity in planning for urban development also assuming (or assisted by a parallel and interrelated structure) the role to mobilize and organize a funding support. To a large extent the strategy will influence decisions on organizational/institutional arrangements as at the same time such structures might also influence the development of the strategy itself. Once the basic elements (components) of the intervention (strategy) are put in place then it would be necessary to specify the necessary actions (measures). These are expressed as combination of regulatory, economic (incentives, taxation, etc.) and physical (infrastructure projects, renovation actions, etc.) but also organizational measures,

Finally, the existing institutional framework provides a good basis for starting to build up a ***Framework for Urban Regeneration***. The decision on the appropriate organizational form (i.e. Commission, Special Agency, etc.) depends on the possibilities available by the institutional context, the actors and their individual strategies and resources and the desirable outcome in terms of focus and characteristics (goals and objectives-strategy). It is obviously a mix of official (public and semi-public) sector, private entrepreneurs, NGOs (those appropriate) and the resident community (represented appropriately).

## CONCLUSION

There is a strong need in the region to promote the case for urban regeneration. Major cities in the North of the Mediterranean have made such an attempt, although in the South there is still a lot to be done. In principle, urban regeneration is considered to be a great undertaking that could not be supported by an individual actor-stakeholder. This type of intervention requires large financial investment and implies the participation of numerous actors. In addition to the support needed to generate the financial resources for such an endeavour, a lot of effort has to be employed in order to convince the decision-makers that the process of urban regeneration is necessary in order to rejuvenate their cities. The mechanism for exchange of experience between cities sharing common problems helps to promote this concept, and increase stakeholders' awareness of the benefits of the urban regeneration. The Guidelines will be a practical methodological tool, which will help the decision-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders implement the process of urban regeneration in Mediterranean coastal cities.

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